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AUTHOR Cranney, A. Garr; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Since most secondary school reading textbooks give home economics only minimal attention, this paper identifies selected information sources in home economics reading skills and in home economics for high school reading specialists. The first portion of the paper discusses eight principle problems that home economics poses for secondary school reading teachers, as well as a rationale for and description of the subsequent bibliography. The second part of the paper provides a list of representative secondary school home economics texts and a longer list of books, book chapters, and articles intended to provide help for secondary school reading specialists. (HTH)

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THE READING SKILLS OF HOME ECONOMICS: PROBLEMS AND SELECTED REFERENCES

A. Garr Cranney
Box 42 MCKB
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602

(801) 377-4432 (home)
(801) 378-4805 (office)

Maxine Rowley
Brigham Young University

Loya Stonehocker
Grande Prairie Regional College, Canada

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The reading skills literature in home economics is scarce. Reading problems in this field are discussed and selected references from an extensive review of the literature are presented.

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The Reading Skills of Home Economics:
Problems and Selected References

Home economics presents at least eight problems to secondary school reading teachers. First, large numbers of poor readers are sent or find their way into home economics classes. Second, some home economics reading such as financial statements or zoning ordinances is very difficult for high school students. Third, many home economics teachers do not use or have reading materials for their students. Fourth, few home economics teachers have training in or sensitivity to the potential of reading in teaching their subject. Fifth, information intended for reading teachers about the field is limited and hard to locate. Sixth, home economics is an unusually diverse field requiring a wide range of reading skills. Seventh, due to technological progress, home economics literacy requirements in both homemaking and work situations are increasing. Eighth, the popular image of home economics as an easy non-academic subject is misleading in terms of the complex reading skills required.

For example, consider the skill implications of reading a sewing pattern, a floor plan, or a table of nutritional values. Reading advertisements, appliance warranties, or insurance policies also present problems. The literature of developmental psychology and textile chemistry are other types of home economics reading. In reality, the range of reading skills presented by the field is perhaps the most formidable of all the content areas. It involves virtually the full spectrum of reading skills--from the detailed, precise directions of recipes to the subtle inferences and interpretations of family dynamics in adolescent novels.

Added to this is the comprehension and vocabulary problems of several subfields, each with its distinctive notation, informational style and concept load. From a skills perspective, it is apparent that all of this can constitute an intimidating challenge to even the most skilled of reading teachers.

The technical language used in home economics is frequently more difficult to learn than many teachers realize. Students must be able to read and comprehend textbooks and technical manuals, explanations, directions, instruction sheets, maps, graphs, directories, and rules. This is compounded by the problem that students with reading difficulties are already concentrated in home economics because parents, counselors, and the students themselves feel little or no reading will be required.

Home economics draws its specialized vocabulary from roots that penetrate the physical and social sciences, the arts, and the humanities in order to organize and disseminate knowledge that will benefit families and society. The technical vocabulary derived from these knowledge systems produces textbooks and manuals that often have high reading difficulty levels. When this situation is combined with lower ability students, most home economics teachers lack the background to cope with the wide range of reading problems they face.

Most secondary school reading textbooks, however, give home economics only minimal attention. The field, if mentioned at all, is usually a part of a brief catchall chapter in which a number of vocational subjects are included. Unfortunately, many recently published secondary reading texts entirely omit the field. Even recent research treatments of content area reading skills (Dupuis, 1984) omit consideration of the field because of its size and complexity.

The purpose of this paper is to identify selected information sources in home economics reading skills and in home economics for the high school reading teacher. The authors have team taught seminars in reading for home economics pre-service secondary teachers since 1979. Thirty-four secondary reading texts, selected other home economics texts, and several ERIC searches were reviewed. Also a 35 year review of the principal journals in reading and in home economics was conducted as part of the preparation for this paper.

Home economics as a field is comprised of several broad areas: family relations and child growth and development, parent education, foods and nutrition, housing and interior living environments, family resource management and consumer economics, clothing and textiles, and career education. Home economics is a philosophical subject that integrates these subject matter specialty areas into a consistent whole and teaches their practical application.

Principal professional journals in home economics are The Vocational Education Journal, Illinois Teacher of Home Economics, and the Journal of Home Economics. Popular magazines in the field include Forecast and Co-Ed. The largest professional group is the American Home Economics Association with a membership of about 42,000. There are approximately 7,000 home economics secondary school teachers and 3,000 teachers in higher education in the United States. Besides teaching, major employment in the field is in business as consumer consultants, family financial advisors, and home demonstrators. Other employment is in Department of Agriculture extension services, state welfare agencies, and in advertising and related trade agencies. Most employment out of the secondary school system requires graduate school preparation.

For secondary reading teachers, high school courses in home economics typically have titles such as: foods, child development, home living, nursery schools, clothing, parenting, career exploration, and free enterprise. These courses are not part of the traditional pre-college core curriculum. Because of expensive equipment needs and their status as electives, they often are assigned low budget priorities by administrators.

For general orientation to the field, the review of home economics teaching in the Encyclopedia of Education (Nelson, 1982) is recommended. Also, an examination of representative high school texts in home economics is helpful. Recommended and listed by the authors for orientation purposes are eight current texts covering each subfield.

The longer reading skills list is composed of books, book chapters, and articles intended to provide help for reading specialists. Most consider teaching uses of reading and suggest materials and methods for a variety of students and situations which relate to reading. Secondary school content area reading textbooks are marked with an asterisk.

The Snedaker thesis in the reading skills references is composed of case studies, many of which have direct application to reading. That list was revised and updated by the second author and, along with additional listings of other literature resources in home economics, is available on request from the Home Economics Department at Brigham Young University. Another recommended reference not available to the authors at the time the paper was prepared is Home Economics Reading Strategies, a manual for developing reading skills. It is available from The Division of Occupational and Vocational Studies at Pennsylvania

State University. Recommended references throughout the paper represent the opinion of the authors, not JR or The IRA.

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